



The Commissioner's Blog

Thoughts from
Kentucky's Commissioner of Education
Kevin C. Brown, Interim Commissioner



September 25, 2015

This week, David Couch, associate commissioner for the Office of Knowledge, Information and Data Services (KIDS), authored the commissioner's blog. He appeared this week before the state Budget Review Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education to share some great news about how Kentucky is taking the lead nationally once again on education technology in an effort to support student learning.

*Kevin C. Brown
Interim Commissioner*

Educator voices heard in support of ed tech improvements

Back in 1995, Kentucky was the first state to connect all of its K-12 school districts to the Internet. Now, 20 years later, Kentucky is once again in the national spotlight by becoming the first state to reach the goal of 100 kb in Internet capacity for every K-12 student. This means a faster, more robust connection to online educational tools, services and resources.

At the same time, the state has installed a safe and secure barrier around students in a way that promotes the proper and efficient use of the Internet through the development of good digital citizenship skills and also allows each district to make the 100 kb per student investment go further. Now, districts can better prioritize their most important services to make the most of their Internet bandwidth for virtual courses and content, online testing, student Internet research and even running payroll.

Also because of this upgraded Internet infrastructure, the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) was able to launch the new online [Microsoft IT Academy](#) for all 287 Kentucky high schools and 53 Area Technology Centers. In August alone, 2,000 courses were completed. So, the academy is off to a great start.

An additional benefit of the state's technology investment is that KDE is better able to maximize the E-rate federal funding program, which has allowed KDE to increase the offers of assistance sent to districts in 2015. Districts could use this money to replace aging computers or to get their own federal E-rate rebates after replacing aging or installing wireless networking systems in their school buildings.

This investment is already making an impact in schools and districts. A 2015 survey of all 173 Kentucky school district education technology leaders resulted in them consistently listing their district's transition to the new Internet network as the top Kentucky K-12 education technology accomplishment of the year.

The biggest reason behind the great news described above has its roots in some not so good news we got from Kentucky teachers on the Teaching, Empowering, Leading and Learning Working Conditions Survey. In 2013, Kentucky teacher's feedback confirmed that additional education technology funding was needed.

KDE had submitted a request during the 2012 legislative session, yet it was the survey responses that legitimized the need and therefore gave great credibility to the department's successful funding request to the legislature in 2014. It was teachers who helped to make our strongest and best case on the need to replace an aging education technology infrastructure that K-12 leaders, staff, students and teachers have grown to depend on more and more as each year passes. Technology has become vital for administrative, instructional, communication, research, testing and decision-making purposes since the first Kentucky Educational Technology System Internet network, firewall and content management system were put in place in the 1990s.

As a result of Kentucky's ed tech investment, in the 2015 TELL Survey, all 10 education technology-related questions showed improvement. The two biggest jumps were the speed and reliability of the Internet and teachers having sufficient training to fully utilize technology. Additionally, 96 percent of school leadership reported using data to improve student learning and 95 percent of teachers believe parents are provided with useful information about student learning through things like the Infinite Campus parent portal and their child's school website. Thanks to all Kentucky teachers who took the TELL Survey in 2011, 2013 and 2015. Your input made a huge difference to the increased education technology funding we received in 2014 and these significant ed tech achievements in 2015.

This [Infographic](#) gives a complete picture of educational technology in Kentucky public schools. The graphic was developed by using data collected directly from Kentucky public school districts through BrightBytes, a survey of students and parents; the district ed tech spending Technology Activity Report; and the district Technology Readiness Report.

In closing, thank you to all of those – past and present – in Kentucky school districts, on the Kentucky Board of Education, at the Kentucky Department of Education, in the legislature and at other state agencies who, with our vendor partners, have made awesome things happen in education technology for our K-12 students and teachers during my 24 years with the department.